



BU PhD Studentships 2007

New directions in the measurement and evaluation on public relations programmes

Background to Research

The measurement and evaluation of public relations programmes has long been atop the research agenda for public relations (McElreath & Blamphin 1994, White & Blamphin 1994, Synnott & McKie 1997) and there is continuing demand for applied research in this field (Gregory & Watson 2007 forthcoming), although the essential methodology has been in place for many years. However, it is evident that there are large gaps between practitioners and academics in the direction of research and “blind spots” in academic research on business language such as “return on investment” and the use of internet and social media methods for evaluation. Gregory and Watson have postulated four research areas, which bear investigation by doctoral candidates. These are:

1. The widespread adoption of robust evaluation methodology has been slower than its scholarly development. Why has such a gap developed between public relations scholars and practitioners? How wide is the gap and what methods can narrow it?
2. There is a well-documented difference between academic research and industry practice over the concept of Return on Investment (ROI) in measuring and evaluating public relations activity. The reasons for the difference and the preference for business language and evaluation methods in the practitioner sphere may be signs of a lack of confidence by the industry in the quality of its advice and its contribution to organisational well-being. Study is needed into the reasons for this preference for business measures and language, bearing in mind that, in many countries, there is more than two decades of academic teaching in public relations that has emphasised the use of social science and market research methodologies for research, planning and evaluation of communication activity.
3. The replacement of hierarchic models of evaluation (Lindenmann 1993, Cutlip et al 1994, Macnamara 2002) may need to be considered in view of the development of practitioner-developed “communication scorecard” models which use multiple formal and informal metrics and feedback. The two recent UK studies into “Most Admired Companies” (Gregory et al 2004, 2005) that found multiple metrics were being used widely, which appears to be at variance from the predominant practitioner search for a single metric. Is this a result of more sophisticated practice in larger organisations or is the beginning of a trend to scorecards in corporate public relations?
4. Given that some public relations activities that can be monitored by almost immediate techniques and tools, such as blogs and wikis, do new theories and approaches need to be developed which conceptualise this capability? The model of social marketing (McGuire

1984) that has been followed by some in public relations (Coombs and Holloday 2006), implies there is a period of gestation in which the recipient of messages processes them before acting, but with immediate response and debate now available, does this need revisiting?

Outstanding Applicants

These PhD bursaries are an opportunity for excellent students considering a research careers or academically-qualified practitioners to immerse themselves in research and theory-making in a leading Media School, which revels in the relationship between the academy and professional practice. You should have a First or high quality 2:1 at bachelors level and, possibly, a Masters with a strong dissertation.

Supervisory Team & Research Environment

The supervisory team will comprise Dr Tom Watson, Reader in Communication, and **ANO**. Dr Watson has researched and published extensively on the measurement and evaluation of public relations programmes. He also had a 20 year career in public relations consultancy, which was marked by his chairmanship of the UK's Public Relations Consultants Association from 2000 to 2002. Currently, he is developing research projects which would link directly to PhD Bursaries.

Informal Enquiries

Please contact Dr Tom Watson on 01202 965140 or twatson@bournemouth.ac.uk

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